

Students Bring Meaning to Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data

“This process makes the data come alive, with students who are engaged in making choices between risky and healthy behaviors. The students doing the analysis were energized by the discussion - pushing beyond the numbers to find their true meaning and exploring the implications of this”.

*Bob McNamara, Superintendent
Washington West Supervisory Union*

The YRBS Student Analysis project, funded by the Department of Education, is an opportunity for students to take a lead in bringing meaning to their own survey data and taking steps to strengthen their school and community based on their findings.

Over the past four years, leadership teams of students and teachers from thirteen Vermont high schools, one middle school and several community partnership organizations have participated in this initiative. They have received training to:

- organize day retreats for students to analyze the data, producing a "Student Executive Summary" which identifies three strengths, three areas of concern and a preliminary plan of action,
- organize Dialogue Nights to share the “Student Executive Summary” with the greater community, and
- frame next steps, which the group implements in the second half of the school year to address identified concerns and build on existing strengths.

This project is again funded for the 2011-2012 school year and there is an opportunity for up to six high school teams and four middle school teams to be involved in the coming year. (Please note: we recommend that participating students be in at least the 8th grade.)

It is very important that the adults and students involved are an existing group, which sees the YRBS analysis work furthering their mission or goals. Examples are:

- community prevention group which already has a student leadership team and a local school partner
- school nurse, working with a sub-committee of student government
- SAP counselor and their VTLSP group
- health teacher who uses this as a component of the curriculum

The benefits of being involved include:

1. Each school participates in the full day orientation training (late September) and dialogue night training (mid-fall) free of cost.
2. Each participating school receives approximately \$300 as discretionary money to fund the work (meeting and community dialog night supplies, retreat costs support for costs related to action steps, etc.).
3. On-going consultation is provided for adult and youth coordinators.
4. Networking youth groups across schools, committed to a common goal, including showcasing the work at a spring state-wide conference.

The responsibilities of involvement include:

Creating a leadership team (5-7 students, 1-2 adults) responsible for the project as a whole. Their core responsibilities include:

- A. attending the two trainings noted above,
- B. organizing the Student YRBS Analysis Retreat and Dialogue Night,
- C. spearheading the action steps identified through this work, over the spring, and
- D. participating in a spring conference to showcase the work

If you are interested in participating in this project or just want to know more, please contact Helen Beattie Ed.D, project coordinator, at hnbeattie@gmail.com or 802-472-5127.

The YRBS Student Analysis project is made possible by the Vermont Department of Education with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information contact Kate O'Neill at kathryn.oneill@state.vt.us or 802-828-5151.